

VISITING THE CAPITOL DURING LEGISLATIVE SESSIONS

If you or your class at school plans to visit the Capitol this winter during the annual legislative session, here are some suggestions to make your visit more educational and fun:



PLAN YOUR VISIT.

Review what will be taking place here at the Capitol during your visit. Legislative committees meet in the mornings. Most committee meetings begin at either 7:45 a.m. or 10:00 a.m. and last for two hours. The Senators and Representatives convene in their respective chambers at 2 p.m. each afternoon for their daily sessions.

Use the Legislative Research Council web site to review what will be taking place during the time you spend at the Capitol. To find committee agendas, click on "Current Legislative Session" and then on "Chamber or Committee". From there, you can select the committee of interest to you. Click on "Detail" to see where the committee meets and when. Click on "Agenda" to find the list of bills that will be heard at a particular meeting. Agendas are generally posted 48 hours in advance of the meeting.

If your visit brings you to the Capitol in the afternoon, click on "Chamber or Committee" and then choose either "Senate" or "House" and click on "Calendar". The calendar will display the bills that will be heard in that particular chamber on that afternoon. Calendars are only posted one day in advance at the conclusion of the current day's session so you will need to look at that the night before you come to Pierre.



Let your local legislators know that you are coming.

Legislators like to know when people from their districts are coming to the Capitol for a visit. If it is at all possible, they want to greet you; give them a chance to do so. They can be reached by letter or by e-mail or you can call the House lobby or the Senate lobby and leave a message for them.

KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT.

The Capitol is a busy place during legislative sessions.

Parking is at a premium. There is a large parking area on the north

side of the Capitol, but it fills up quickly. You are likely to end up parking along one of the side streets near the Capitol. Plan to park quite a ways away and walk a distance to the building. The halls are often congested. If you arrive in a large group, try not to block hallways or stairways; always leave a path for legislators and others who must get passed you.

Inside the Capitol. The space within the Capitol set aside for the Legislature is on the third and fourth floors. Most of the committee rooms and the chamber galleries are located on fourth floor. Several stairways and elevators are available for your use. If you enter the Capitol through the north entrance, stop at the Capitol Security office just to the left after you enter the door. There, you can find a map of the building and other information. The Governor's Office is located in the west wing of the second floor, and the Supreme Court occupies the east wing of the second floor. There is a café in the basement of the Capitol that serves breakfast and lunch items along with pop and snacks.

Maintain proper decorum. Be quiet and respectful in the hallways, committee rooms, and in the galleries of the chambers. Loud talking, hand clapping, and disturbing those busy at work in other ways are not appropriate behaviors. Be mindful of where you are and the work that is being done here.



Fridays are not the best days to come. Unless your visit includes only spending time here in the morning, Fridays are not the best days to come. Often, the legislators will conclude their work a bit early on that day to allow them to travel to their homes for the weekend. Thus, you might be disappointed if you come here on a Friday afternoon and find out that the legislators have concluded their work and gone home for the weekend.

HOW CAN I SHARE MY VIEWS WITH THE LEGISLATURE?

Testifying before the Legislature can be an intimidating task, especially to those new to the process. Following these simple guidelines, however, will make it easier. Give it a try. It is your right to testify on any bill that comes before the South Dakota Legislature. You will be glad you did, and the legislators will appreciate your input.



DO YOUR HOMEWORK.

The Legislative Research Council's web site is the best tool to use in your preparations. Use the site to track the bill of special interest to you. Go to: <http://legis.state.sd.us>.

If you don't already know the bill number, you can locate it by the subject matter or by the bill's sponsor. Once you have found the bill number, it will lead you to all the information you need. You can read the text of the bill, find out which legislators have sponsored the bill, and monitor how it is progressing in the legislative process.

You can also use the site to locate information on the committee to which the bill was assigned. You can find out which legislators serve on the committee, when and where the committee meets, and when the bill of interest to you is scheduled for a hearing. All of this information will help you be more informed and ready to make your presentation.

PLAN AHEAD.

Plan your testimony. If what you plan to say is lengthy or complicated, it might be best to limit your remarks and offer more detailed testimony in writing to the members of the committee. If you plan to distribute handouts, bring enough copies for everyone on the committee and a couple extras for staff members.

Coordinate with others. If you are testifying with a group of others, coordinate your testimony so that you are not repeating what others say.

Register, if necessary. If you plan to testify on behalf of anyone other than yourself, you must register as a lobbyist with the Secretary of State, pay a \$25 fee, and wear a name badge. It is the law. (See SDCL 2-12.)

BE READY.

Arrive early. Parking spaces near the Capitol are very limited during the legislative session so be prepared to park a good distance away from the building.

Get to the committee room on time. Bills are usually taken in the order listed on the agenda, but that is not always the case. The chair of the committee can take the bills on the agenda in any order. Also, the committee rooms are not spacious. If you arrive late, you may not get a seat.

Sign the guest register. It is located near the entrance of the room. Provide your name; the name of the group that you represent, if any; the bill on which you want to speak; and indicate whether you are for or against the bill.

Wait your turn. The committee chair will announce each bill and provide time for both proponents and opponents to speak. Go to the podium only at the appropriate time.

Be brief and polite. Begin by addressing the chair and the other committee members and let them know who you are and why you are there. Do not repeat what others have already said.

Relax. The legislators are happy to hear from you. They do not expect expert testimony from everyone. Answer any questions the committee members may have in the best way you can. And have fun!

Once the committee acts on the bill, your role is complete, at least for the time being. If the bill of interest to you is a Senate Bill, for example, and it passes the committee, it will then be voted upon by the entire Senate membership. If they pass it, it will then go over to the House of Representatives and be assigned to another committee, and the process repeats itself. You can now testify at that committee as well. It will be easy now that you have experience!

If, however, the bill does not pass the committee or the Senate as a whole, it proceeds no further in the process. Be on the look out, however, because similar bills might be working their way through the process at the same time. You never know!

You might be wondering if testifying is the only way to get your views across to the legislature. It is not. The legislators understand that it is not possible for everyone to travel to Pierre to testify. You can write to the legislators who represent you at any time. Let them know your views. They would be happy to hear from you. Their contact information is provided on the Legislative Research Council web site. They also have e-mail addresses that make it even easier to reach them.